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RUSSIA'S EASTERN THEATER, 1650-1850 SPRINGBOARD OR STRATEGIC BACKYARD ?

Two great events have marked the history of the Eurasian land mass. The sudden irruption of Chingis Khan in 1220 laid the foundation of a Mongol empire that would last nearly 300 years. The patient work of Russian empire-building began in 1332, when the Grand Prince of Vladimir (Moscow) obtained from the Mongol khan the charter allowing him to collect the tribute from the Russian land on the khan's behalf. That modest beginning paved the way for the eventual destruction of the Mongol empire and the reunification of the Mongol space under Russian leadership by 1915, nearly 600 years later.

It was only five years after his coronation that Ivan IV (1533-1584) launched a major expedition against Kazan in 1552. He then sailed down the Volga to annex Astrakhan four years later. The Kazan khanate had been a major opponent of Moscow's rise to power in western Eurasia; both cities controlled the water route linking Moscow with the Caspian Sea, beyond which the intercontinental trade routes led to India across Persia and Central Asia. Geopolitical and commercial motivations were closely intertwined. Kazan occupied a strategic location of the first order. Russian infantry (*strel´tsy*) sailed from it past Astrakhan to the delta of the Terek, where they built Terskii gorodok in 1586. Kazan also led beyond the Kama to Bashkiria, where Ufa was built at the confluence of the Ufa and the Belaia in 1574. This was a strong fort to assert Russian power against the Bashkirs, who would continue to resist Russian encroachments for the next 200 years. Even more significantly, Kazan was the gateway to Siberia. Tobolsk was founded in 1587, to become the capital of Siberia until the end of the eighteenth century. Tomsk was founded in 1604, Eniseisk in 1618, Yakutsk in 1632, and Irkutsk in 1651. A small

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wintering place had been created at Okhotsk in 1647. It thus took but sixty years from the founding of Tobolsk to cross the whole of Siberia.[1]

What factors accounted for such a rapid expansion? The patient and determined effort of the Muscovite grand princes to build a solid and homogenous core around a hydrographic network of rivers forming so many spokes of a wheel, with Moscow as the hub, slowly created a seemingly irreversible momentum. The Volga drew the Russians to Kazan and Astrakhan, and the Kama took them to the foothills of the Urals, beyond which other rivers led to the Irtysh and the Ob. Another factor was the conviction that Moscow must become the independent capital of Orthodoxy, acutely felt after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, and must assert its hegemony over Islam, to which Uzbek, the khan of the Kipchak khanate, had converted his people in the 1330s. There was also simple greed. The Muscovite core, still ensconced almost entirely in the forest zone, without access to the wide oceans or to the transcontinental trade routes, hoped to profit from the merciless hunting of the fur-bearing animals in the Siberian taiga and from the incorporation of the trade routes which had been the economic lifeblood of the Mongol Empire.

But Russia's success was made possible not by intentions alone, but by political and military superiority. The Muscovite dynasty was able to build a powerful political and military machine, while the khan's power was always circumscribed and unstable, threatened by constant internal struggles within his family and among the clans, whose elders always resisted their khan's attempt to centralize power in his house. Nomadic life did not facilitate the creation and institutionalization of stable political structures which could outlive the authority of a charismatic khan. The contrast between Moscow's centralized politics and the khans' unsettled rule paralleled the growing struggle between the world of the settler and that of the nomad.[2]

The integration of Russian principalities and republics into an emerging Muscovite core required the creation of an army to serve the grand prince's ambitions. Territorial princes summoned to reside permanently in Moscow became the high command of the new army, their own servants became "nobles", and various small landowners became provincial *deti boiarskie* (literally boyars' sons), all of them required to serve in forts and towns across the land. Moreover, toward

1. G.V. Vernadsky, *The Tsardom of Moscow, 1547-1682* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 51-57, 63-64; T. Armstrong, ed., *Yermak's Campaign in Siberia: A selection of documents* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1975); Yu. Semenov, *Siberia: Its Conquest and Development* (Montréal: International Publishers' Representatives, 1963), 62-91; G. Lantzeff, *Siberia in the Seventeenth Century. A Study of the Colonial Administration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943), 33-86; and R. Kerner, *The Urge to the Sea. The Course of Russian History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942), 66-88.

2. For the international context see W. McNeill, *Europe's Steppe Frontier, 1500-1800*, (Chicago: University Press, 1964), ch. 3; M. Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 76-125 and S. Jagchid and V. Symons, *Peace, War and Trade along the Great Wall. Nomadic-Chinese Interaction through Two Millenia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 79-113, 172-187.

the end of the fifteenth century, the grand prince set about creating a militia (*opolchenie*) of cavalrymen consisting of individuals (*pomeshchiki*) who offered to serve the grand prince in return for a plot of land called a *pomest´e*. They would later become the land — and serf — owners of the expanding core and, eventually, its ruling class. The militia was not a standing army, but was called into service to repel attacks by nomads or to go to war against the grand prince's enemies, and was disbanded when peace returned.[3]

Three new developments would help the settler gain victory over the nomad. One was the creation of a force of *strel´tsy* (shooters), Russia's first permanent infantry formation shortly before the Kazan expedition of 1552 which would be its baptism of fire. They were paid for military service and in peacetime lived in separate tax-free quarters (*slobody*) in towns and forts, as well as in Moscow. They had to be free people and volunteers, and had to know how to shoot as well as possible. They served for life and, with the passage of time, were succeeded by their children and other relatives. In wartime, they were attached to regiments, into which the motley army of nobles, *deti boiarskie*, and *pomeshchiki* was divided, under the command of *voevody*. The *streltsy* were not given land individually, but as members of a *sotnia* (the word for a hundred men) led by their own headmen (*golova*) subordinated in peacetime to the town *voevoda*, who was not in the chain of command of the army, but was a territorial officer with civil and military responsibilities for the security of the fort or the town. Their weapons were the pistol (*ruchnoi pischal*), a poleax, and a sword. In the eastern theater, the *strel´tsy* and their families were essentially armed settlers, and towns and forts were so many islands of settlement in an immense steppe still dominated by nomadic horsemen.[4]

The second development to tip the balance of power on the ground towards the settler was the emergence of the Cossacks, who were of two kinds. First, there were town ("service") Cossacks, who were named after their town. Some were freemen, others were men pressed into service from various categories of people, including peasants. After the conquest of Kazan and Astrakhan, their ranks were also filled with ethnic Tatars, Chuvash and Mordvins under their own leaders (*murzy*). The basic Cossack unit was also the sotnia, combined to form regiments (*pribory*) of 500 men, under a *golova* or ataman, who was likewise subordinated to the town *voevoda*. The Cossacks formed a cavalry force, although some served without a horse; they and the *streltsy* were complementary formations. Both were found across the whole of Siberia, the Cossacks as the pathfinders of Russian expansion, the *strel´tsy* and *voevody,* who would take over the control of the country after them.

A very different kind of Cossack developed on the distant periphery of Muscovy. These Cossacks consisted largely of runaways in a country where frontier air made man free, far away from the *voevody*, *streltsy* and town Cossacks.

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3. A. Chernov, *Vooruzhennye sily russkogo gosudarstva v XV-XVII vv.* (M.: Voennoe Izdat., 1954), 22-29; B. Davies, "The Foundations of Muscovite Military Power, 1453-1613" in F. Kagan and R. Higham, eds., *The Military History of Tsarist Russia* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 11-30.

4. Chernov, *Vooruzhennye sily…*, 39-40, 46-52, 82-86.

They were first found in the second half of the sixteenth century in the woods of the Don valley. This Don Cossack Host (*voisko*) became the mother house for other hosts, which sank roots in the valley of the Terek and Ural Rivers, and along the lower Volga. Fiercely independent, they often created problems for the Muscovite government, which nevertheless paid them a salary in money and in kind, with powder and lead for their guns. They remained tied to Moscow by a common Orthodox religion, and eventually destabilized the world of the nomad by running punitive expeditions seizing pastures, and in general wearing down the nomad's power of resistance.[5]

The third development that explains the Muscovites' comparative advantage not only against the aboriginal communities of the eastern theater, but also against the Persians and even the Turks, was the use of artillery.[6] Guns made of copper, iron and bronze had come into use at the time of the encounter on the Ugra River in 1480, and field pieces mounted on horse-drawn carts were deployed in the first half of the sixteenth century. Siege artillery was used against Kazan in 1552.[7]

I

The Time of Trouble, which followed the extinction of the Riurikid dynasty in 1598 and the ill-fated rule of Boris Godunov (1598-1605), a prince of Mongol lineage, came to an end with the proclamation of the Romanov dynasty in 1613. However, it was not until the reign of the second Romanov tsar, Alexei Mikhailovch, which began in 1645, one year after the Manchus established their own dynasty in Peking (Beijing), that a definite and consistent expansionist impulse became clear once again. Geography dictated that it should be directed, as it had been in the second half of the sixteenth century, toward the Caucasus and Persia, toward Central Asia across Bashkiria, and toward eastern Siberia, now more specifically against Manchu China.

The first source of contention between Russia and China was the establishment of a Russian fort at Albazin on the Amur River, the northern perimeter of the Manchu's homeland. The issue was never in doubt. The Manchus enjoyed

5. *Ibid.*, 29-30, 86-89, 128-30, 165-67. See also G. Stökl, *Die Entstehung des Kosakentums* (Munich: Isar Verl., 1953) who focuses on the Cossacks of the "southern theater"; M. Khoroshkhin, "Voenno-statisticheskii obzor kazakhch´ikh voisk," *Voennyi Sbornik*, 5 (1881): 86-119, 6 (1881): 309-24, here 86-100.

6. Chernov, *Vooruzhennye sily…*, 36-40, 89-91, 100-102. On the siege of Kazan see p. 49-50. T. Armstrong's edition of *Ermak's campaign* contains valuable illustrations showing the Russian's use of firepower, esp. p. 96, 109, 125, 131, 137, 155. V. Surikov's painting of 1895 (frontispiece) strikingly emphasizes the contrast between Russian firearms and the Tatars' bows and arrows. For general works on the "gunpowder revolution" see G. Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge u.a.: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3, 157-175, challenged by J. Black in *A Military Revolution? Military Change and European Society, 1550-1800* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1991), 4-8, 67-68, 93-96.

7. Chernov, *Vooruzhennye sily…*, 101-104.

overwhelming military superiority, and in 1686 razed the fort after killing the *voevoda*. The dynasty conclusively showed the Russians could not gain staying power on the river. The second was the lack of a mutually acceptable border between the two powers to control the peregrination of nomads between Lake Baikal and Mongolia and prevent the escape of runaways from one side to the other. A border agreement was reached in two stages. The Treaty of Nerchinsk (1687) marked out a Russo-Manchurian border running from Mongolia to the Sea of Okhotsk which blocked Russia's access to the Amur River. The Treaty of Kiakhta (1727) demarcated a Russo-Mongolian border stretching all the way to the Abakan valley. These two segments of a single boundary would guarantee the peace until the 1860s. During that period, Eastern Siberia was downgraded to the status of a strategic backyard, and relations between the two empires became essentially commercial.

The Treaty of Nerchinsk coincided with the coup that brought the future Peter I to power. The tsar, however, did not effectively assume the reins of government until his return from Europe in 1698, when he mercilessly crushed a rebellion of *strel´tsy*. By then, this infantry component had fallen on hard times. Beginning in the 1650s, new formation regiments had come into being, commanded by foreigners and drilled in the western manner, with the soldiers and cavalrymen supplied by levies, like the one of 1661, of one man per twenty households. By 1689, this new Russian army consisted of 88, 405 men in 63 regiments, while the old noble militia numbered only about 7500 men and the *strel´tsy* less than 10,000.[8] The war with Sweden that began in 1700 and would last for twenty-one years witnessed an enormous increase in the size of the military establishment, but the deployment of the army in the western and southern theaters in wartime and in the core in peacetime would quickly expose the relative strategic insignificance of the eastern theater.

Nevertheless, the so-called Great Northern War had important consequences in the east as well. The administrative-territorial reform of 1708 divided the empire into eight provinces, each headed by a governor who had to reside in the provincial capital. Two of them were in the eastern theater, one in Kazan, the other in Tobolsk; a third was added in 1717, when Astrakhan province split off from Kazan.[9] In other words, the three former khanates became provinces, their former khans replaced by Russian governors. The immediate background of the reform was the state of emergency brought about by the advance of the Swedish king toward Russia (which would end for him with the catastrophe of Poltava); its purpose was to speed up the collection of taxes and the levying of recruits for the army in the field

8. Chernov, *Vooruzhennye sily…*, 134-49; R. Hellie, *Enserfment and Military Change in Muscovy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 202-207, 217-23, 226-34, 272; P. Bushkovitch, "The Romanov Transformation, 1613-1725," in F. Kagan and R. Highan, ed., *The Military History of Tsarist Russia* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 31-45.

9. *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii, First Series, 1649-1825*, St. Petersburg, 1830 (hereafter *PSZ*), Vol. 4, n° 2218 (1708), and Vol. 5, n° 3119 (1717). J. LeDonne, *Absolutism and Ruling Class. The Formation of the Russian Political Order 1700-1825* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 69.

commanded by the tsar in person; its effect was to create powerful regional commands in Astrakhan, Kazan, and Tobolsk, headed by individuals closely connected by marriage with the Romanov dynasty and operating without the restraints of a written instruction. These commands formed a tripod from which to launch a forward policy directed against Central Asia and Persia.

Such a policy, however, would inevitably bring the Russians face to face with the Zunghars, a confederation of four clans of western Mongols, which became a powerful factor in the region. In the 1630s one of these four Mongol clans emigrated across the Kazakh steppe and the Ural River to settle on the left bank of the Volga, where it eventually became known as the Kalmyks. The Zunghars, led by a *kontaisha*, sought to reunite all the Mongols, an ambition which the Manchus considered a threat to the vital interests of the dynasty. Occasional clashes also took place with the Russians over the collection of the *iasak* all the way north to Krasnoiarsk, and with the Kazakhs, a non-Mongol but Turkic people, over pastures in the steppe between the Irtysh and the Lake Balkhash. The Zunghars were thus the most turbulent element in the westernmost segment of the Russo-Chinese frontier, a potential threat to the Russian advance towards the mountains, and an existential one to the Manchu position in the Kobdo (Hove) depression within the Mongolian Altai, which Peking considered to be the natural boundary of its emerging empire in the northwest. They also straddled the Silk Road, the still important transcontinental commercial route linking China and northern India with Central Asia and Persia via Kashgar, Osh and Bukhara — and a source of substantial revenue.

Beginning in 1709 the Petrine leadership, flushed with its victory over the Swedes at Poltava, pursued a strategy of deep penetration in all three theaters. In 1711, Russian troops were on the Prut to confront Ottomans on the Danube (a disastrous expedition); in 1716, they were in Copenhagen, posed for an invasion of Sweden. In the eastern theater, the high command launched an ambitious program designed to break the power of the Zunghars, transform Transoxiana into a Russian protectorate, and gain a decisive influence in Persia and eastern Transcaucasia.[10] The motivation was largely commercial, or more accurately, fiscal, but the ignorance of the region's geography, the neglect of logistical constraints, and the inadequacy of the means assigned to carry out such an ambitious program doomed it from the start.

Rumors spread by local informers began to reach the governor of Siberia, Prince Matvei Gagarin, soon after his arrival in Tobolsk, that there were gold deposits in Central Asia, and that there might be a fluvian waterway linking it with India. In fact, the advancing Russians were being drawn into the tribal politics of the region, centered around the unstable situation in Khiva, which sought to win its independence from Bukhara. But Gagarin's vision extended far beyond Central Asia. In 1713, he sent an agent as far away as Lake Koko Nor to investigate the prospect of finding gold, but, without waiting for his return, bought a handful of

10. J. LeDonne, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650-1831* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 38-44.

gold dust and sent it to Peter, saying it came from Yarkend (Shache), an outpost on the Silk Road, where the road bifurcated toward Kabul and Persia and across the Karakorum chain toward Kashmir and northern India.[11] He was certain one could reach Yarkend from Tobolsk within three months. The Russians would build forts along the Irtysh and across Zungharia to Yarkend, with garrisons of Tatars commanded by Russian officers. This amounted to a declaration of war on the Zunghars, who were then engaged in a bitter struggle with the Manchus over the control of the Kobdo depression.

The tsar, who was prone to neglect the details in which the devil was likely to hide, was fired up by the prospect of finding gold (in which Russia was totally deficient at the time) and gaining control of a transcontinental trade route that had brought great wealth to Europe. In May 1714, he appointed Lt. Col. Ivan Buchholz to command a force of 3000 men with 1500 horses and 70 guns. The force included Swedish prisoners of war (for their knowledge of fortifications and mining) and Russian merchants. Buchholz's orders were to proceed from Tobolsk to Lake Yamyshev — in fact, a cluster of salt lakes near present-day Pavlodar — to build a fort there, and move on in the spring of 1715 toward Yarkend, building redoubts on the way not more than six days' march from one another; to take Yarkend, build a fort, and find out where the gold was. Buchholz left in February 1715, and Gagarin countered the *kontaisha's* objections with the remarkable statement that the conquest of the Siberian khanate had given Russian the right to claim the entire basin of the Siberian Rivers all the way to their headwaters in the mountains. The Zunghars, who may have numbered as many as 10,000 men, met this declaration of war not with a frontal assault on the Russians, but with a siege designed to starve them out. By the spring of 1716, Buchholz had only 700 men left. The Zunghars allowed them to retreat behind the Om River, an ecological boundary between the forest and steppe zones, which they considered the outer limits of their nomadic world.[12]

But the expedition had not been in vain. Buchholz built a fort (Omsk) at the confluence of the Om and the Irtysh. After his recall, Gagarin sent military parties to build Zhelezenska in 1717, Semipalatinsk the following year. In 1719, Peter ordered Guard Major Ivan Likharev to sail up the Irtysh to Lake Zaisan, build a fort, and find out how to get to Yarkend. Likharev, with only 440 men, not only sailed the entire length of the lake but even entered the Black Irtysh, only to discover it was a dead end, and to face a large Zunghar force that allowed him to retreat

11. J. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order. Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 208. On the rumors that gold dust was found in Yarkend, see L. Boulnois, *Poudre d'or et monnaies d'argent au Tibet (principalement au XVIIIe siècle)* (P.: Éditions du CNRS, 1983), 40-41, 43-46.

12. *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia v tsentral´noi Azii. XVII-XVIII veka. Dokumenty i materialy*, 2 vol. (M., 1989), Vol. 1, 231-236; Zh. Kasymbaev, *Gosudarstvennye deiateli kazakhskikh khanstv (XVIII v.)* (Almaty: Bilim, 1999), 7-11 and "Ekspeditsiia Bukhgol´tsa," *Istoricheskie Nauki*, 1 (1974): 33-39; P. Slovtsov, *Istoricheskoe obozrenie Sibiri* (Novosibirsk: Izdat. Ven-Mer, 1995), 250-252; M. Courant, *L'Asie centrale aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles. Empire kalmouk ou empire mantchou?* (P.: Librairie A. Picard & fils, 1912), 66-67; and J. Michell, *The Russians in Central Asia* (London: Stanford, 1865), 538-539.

without a show of force. On the way back, he laid in 1720 the foundations of Ust-Kamenogorsk on the Irtysh.[13]

Buchholz's expedition was only one prong of a gigantic pincer movement directed against Central Asia. Also in 1714, Peter used the opportunity presented by the accession of a new khan in Khiva to announce he would send an embassy, headed by Guard Captain Prince Alexander Cherkasskii, a Kabardian nobleman who had been raised in the house of Prince Boris Golitsyn, the last chief of the Kazan Chancery. Its ostensible purpose was to congratulate the khan and move on to Bukhara in order to establish trade relations with the commercial hub of Central Asia. In fact, however, Cherkasskii was to find the exact location of Yarkend, how far it was from the Caspian, and whether any river connected it with the sea—a true measure of the Russians' still vague knowledge of the region's geography. The year 1715 was spent investigating a possible connection between the Amu Daria and the Caspian into which the river used to flow before the Khivans supposedly built a dam to deflect its course toward the Aral Sea. The Russians discovered the old channel that ended in Krasnovodsk (Balkhanskii) Bay, drew up a map, and Cherkasskii returned to Astrakhan in October to report to the tsar.

In February 1716, Peter gave Cherkasskii a concise instruction to build a fort for 1000 men at Krasnovodsk; to proceed to Khiva along the old channel and, if possible, to destroy the dam and let the river return to the Caspian; to build a fort and a town on the channel; to induce the khan to become a Russian subject and to accept a Russian palace guard in return for guaranteeing the khanate for his family; to ask Khivans to join a Russian party in search of Yarkend; to supply boats for Russian traders to sail up the Amu Daria in the direction of India; and to investigate the possibility of convincing the Bukhara khan to become a Russian subject. Cherkasskii was promised 4000 men to carry this out, together with merchants interested in trading with the two khans and the Great Moghul of India. A separate instruction bluntly told naval lieutenant Kozhin to investigate the course of the Amu Daria, because the "real business" of the expedition was to find a waterway to India. In March, three regiments of infantry (3600 men) from Kazan, Astrakhan, and Azov were assigned to the expedition with another 400 from various places, together with 100 Astrakhan dragoons, and 22 field copper and cast-iron guns. Kazan would ship provisions to Astrakhan for a year. The force also included 2000 Ural and Terek Cossacks, raising the total number of men to 6100, over 2000 more than originally promised. As with Buchholz, sending such a force was tantamount to a declaration of war on the Central Asia khanates — with unforeseen consequences.

The mission was so poorly planned and carried out that it was fated to end in disaster. Cherkasskii sailed along the northern shore of the Caspian late in September, built a fort at Tiuk-Karagan (Fort Shevchenko) at the tip of the Mangyshlak Peninsula, another in Bekhtir (Eralievo) Bay, and a third in Krasnovodsk Bay. He left

13. *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia…*, Vol. 1, 245-250, 351-352; G. Cahen, *Histoire des relations de la Russie avec la Chine sous Pierre le Grand (1689-1730)* (P.: F. Alcan, 1912), 145-148 ; Slovtsov, *Istoricheskoe obozrenie…*, 252-254 ; Courant, *L'Asie centrale…*, 68.

a garrison in all three forts, thus depleting his force. He returned to Astrakhan overland in December, because the ice already made navigation in the northern Caspian dangerous. In Tiuk-Karagan, he found that 120 of his men had died from lack of water and the insalubrious climate and another 700 had fallen sick.

The expedition against Khiva finally took place in 1717, with a force of only 3500 men, including 300 soldiers, 600 dragoons, 1900 Cossacks and over 500 Tatars, 300 horses, 200 camels, and six guns. It left its assembly point at Gurev, on the mouth of the Ural River, in early June, too late for operations in the steppe, when the heat is unbearable and the grass dries up. Yet, it moved fast, covering the first 300 kilometers to the Emba River in eight days, an average of 37.5 kilometers a day. It then followed the caravan route to Khiva on August 15, after covering the 1,350 kilometers from Gurev in 65 days, or twenty kilometers a day, in a grassless and waterless steppe at the hottest time of the year — when temperatures reached 40 degrees and wells had to be dug up four to eight meters deep. Cherkasskii sent an envoy to the khan to declare his intentions were peaceful, but the khan had already been warned by the Kalmyks that they were not. On August 17, over 20,000 Uzbeks nearly surrounded Cherkasskii's force, attacked, but were repulsed. The khan then resorted to a subterfuge. He expressed a willingness to negotiate, but said Khiva was too small to billet all of Cherkasskii's men, and asked him to break the force up into five small detachments to be housed in different places. Cherkasskii foolishly accepted, and a general massacre took place on August 20. He himself was brought before the khan and beheaded. Although Peter wanted to retain the three forts on the east coast of the Caspian for future operations—showing that his intentions were indeed hostile — this was not carried out and they were abandoned. Cherkasskii's expedition, the first overly ambitions attempt to establish a dominant Russian presence in Central Asia, had failed miserably.[14]

While Cherkasskii's and Buchholz's expeditions must be seen as coordinated moves seeking to give Russia control of the transcontinental trade route between the Caspian and India, Cherkasskii's must also be seen as one prong of a second pincer movement directed toward the same end. While the Kabardian chieftain was busy surveying the Caspian's eastern coast, Peter sent Artemii Volynskii in May on a commercial mission to the Persian capital in Isfahan. Its ostensible purpose was to develop trade relations and to convince the large and wealthy Armenian community to ship Persian silk — the country's major article of trade—across Russia to Moscow and Petersburg for re-export to Western Europe, instead of sending it across Ottoman territory to Mediterranean ports. But the mission was above all an intelligence operation: Volynskii was to study the topography of Persia, the size of its army, the location of its fortresses, whether the country had warships on the Caspian, and, once again, to find out whether any river flowed across Persia from India into that sea.

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14. The expedition is described in detail in D. Golosov, "Pokhod v Khivu v 1717 godu," *Voennyi Sbornik*, 10 (Oct. 1861): 303-364. See also Solov´ev, *Istoriia Rossii drevneishikh vremen*, Vol. 9, 350-352, and A. Lobanov-Rostovsky, *Russia and Asia* (Ann Arbor: The George Wahr Publishing Company, 1951), 73-76.

Volynskii reached Isfahan in March 1717, soon after Buchholz's retreat from the Irtysh and at approximately the same time as when Cherkasskii was about to move against Khiva. Negotiations were difficult, but concluded with a treaty signed in July and ratified by the tsar two years later, and by the shah in 1720. The most important result of the mission was Volynskii's conviction that the Safavid dynasty had reached a terminal stage, and that Russia must seize the opportunity and make war upon it, in order to annex the three provinces fronting the southern shores of the Caspian—Gilian, where most of the mulberry trees were grown, Mazandaran, where the best cotton was produced, and Asterabad (Bandar-e-Torkeman), the junction of caravan routes leading to Bukhara, Kabul, Kashmir, and northern India. Volynskii was also given to understand that the eastern Georgians and Armenians would support such a war. He reported his findings in January 1719 to the tsar, who was only waiting to be convinced, and who immediately appointed him governor of Astrakhan. However, there could be no question of launching military operations until after the conclusion of the war with Sweden. That war came to an end in August 1721, and in the fall of that year, the tsar redeployed troops along the middle Volga for the winter, with orders to assemble in Astrakhan in the spring of 1722.[15]

Volynskii was certain that ten regiments of infantry and four of cavalry, plus 3,000 Cossacks — about 20,000 men — would be enough to compel Persia to accept Russian demands. The precipitant of the war was the sack of Shemakha by Lezgis — nominally subjects of the shah — which caused Russian merchants enormous losses in July 1721, and the news that Kandahar Afghans were invading Persia from the east. They did take Isfahan in February 1722, forcing the shah to flee. Peter arrived in Astrakhan in May, and a force of about 56,000 regulars and Cossacks forming the so-called southern corps (*nizovyi korpus*) left the city in July. It consisted of 22,000 soldiers and 9,000 horsemen, 5,000 sailors, and 20,000 Cossacks who were joined by 20,000 Kalmyk and 30,000 Tatar horsemen. The tsar told one of his officers that he was going to Asterabad and from there to Balkh and Badakhshan the western periphery of the Hindu Kush and the Heartland, known for its precious stones — that camel riders needed only twelve days to get there from Asterabad, and the "no one can bar the way."[16]

But fate decided otherwise. The operational plan called for the cavalry to advance overland toward Derbent, while a flotilla ferried the infantry and supplies from Astrakhan. Derbent fell in August without resistance, but the heat had burned the grass and a storm had damaged the flour. The tsar left his army and returned to Astrakhan; the flotilla sailed on to Rasht, which the Russians took from the

15. Solov´ev, *Istoriia Rossii*, Vol. 9, 366-70; D. Korsakov, "Artemii Petrovich Volynskii. Biograficheskii ocherk," *Drevniia i Novaia Rossiia*, Vol. 1 (Jan.-April 1876): 45-60, here 52-60, and Vol. 1 (Jan.-April 1877): 289-302, here 293-94; N. Kukanova, "Russo-iranskie torgovye otnosheniia v kontse XVII-nachale XVIII v.," *Istoricheskie Zapiski*, vol. 57 (1956): 232-233, 241-249; and N. Kortua, *Russko-gruzinskie vzaimootnosheniia vo vtoroi polovine XVIII veka* (Tbilisi: Izdat. Tbilis. Univ., 1989), 32-36. See also P. Bushev, *Posol´stvo Artemii Volynskogo v Iran v 1715-1718 gg.* (M.: Izdat. Nauka, 1978), 257-260.

16. Solov´ev, *Istoriia Rossii*, Vol. 9, 370-382. See also L. Lockhart, *Nadir Shah: A Critical Study based mainly upon contemporary sources* (London, 1938), 8-11.

Afghans in November. Operations stopped for the winter, but resumed in 1723. Baku was taken in July, and the Russo-Persian treaty of September ceded to Russia "in perpetuity" Derbent, Baku, and the provinces of Gilian, Mazanderan, and Asterabad. However, the shah refused to ratify it when the Ottoman invasion of eastern Transcaucasia promised to change the situation in the field, but the Russo-Ottoman treaty of June 1724 only confirmed Russia's gains. By then, however, the Russians had become overextended. Following Peter's death in January 1725, operations against Mazanderan and Asterabad were suspended, and Russia retained only Gilian and Resht with Enzeli Bay, a major bridgehead for future operations in Persia. Astrakhan and Kazan provinces, which led to the theater of operations of the Southern Corps, whose commander resided in Nizovaia Landing, halfway between Derbent and Baku, created an immense corridor of expansion which would eventually bring Russian power to bear on Khiva and Bukhara from the south as well as in the Amu Daria valley in the direction of India.[17]

Yet the Russian success barely concealed a failure. The troops never got used to the hot and humid weather of the southern Caspian coast, which became the army's graveyard.[18] Beginning in 1732, Persia fell under the sway of an outstanding military commander, who would soon rule Persia until 1747 as Nadir Shah, against whom the Russians could not have prevailed. They wisely decided to cut their losses, withdrew from Gilian in 1732, from Baku and Derbent in 1735, and the Terek became the de facto boundary between the Russian and Persian empires. The gap between Peter's ambitions and the ultimate reality was striking. Nevertheless, this first Transcaucasian encounter created a Russo-Persian frontier in Daghestan, eastern Georgia, and Azerbaidjan (both north and south of the Araks), as well as in Transoxiana. This frontier, which formed a natural extension of the Russo-Chinese frontier, combined with it to separate the Russians from the Persian and Chinese core, and marked out an immense area in which the geopolitical isobar was destined to keep shifting in Russia's favor toward the beginning of the nineteenth century, as the Russian state grew stronger while the Persian and Manchu dynasties entered a long period of decline.

II

A reassessment of Russia's strategy in the eastern theater began immediately after Peter's death. It was motivated as much by fiscal constraints as by the feeling that

17. A short survey of the war is in V. Lystsov, *Persidskii pokhod Petra I, 1722-1723* (M.: Moskovskij Universitet, 1951) and in L. Beskrovny, *Russkaia armiia i flot v XVIII veke* (M.: Voennoe Izdat. Ministerstva Oborony Soiuza SSR, 1958), 239-244. See also Solov´ev, *Istoriia Rossii*, Vol. 9, 384-386 and Kukanova, "Russko-iranskie…," 251-254. A. Osterman, "General´noe sostoianie del i interesov vserossiiskikh so vsemi sosedami i drugimi insotrannymi gosudarstvami v 1726," *Severnyi Arkhiv*, n° 1-2 (1828): 3-61, here 6-16.

18. Solov´ev, *Istoriia Rossii*, 10:8, 13-16.

deep strikes into Central Asia were counterproductive at a time of rising Persian power and the Zunghars' tight grip on the valley of the upper Irtysh. But Russian concerns must be placed in a larger strategic context. The ultimate goal of reaching Central Asian oases and India was not abandoned, but it could not be achieved as long as nomads threatened Russian settlements slowly edging out of the forest zone into the woodland steppe. As a result, the government decided to launch a massive construction program to create a continuous line of forts to demarcate the world of the nomad from that of the settler, and to encourage the settlement of peasants behind the lines.[19] Such a policy was designed to create a logistical base from which to resume the advance into the Caucasus and the steppe at a later date. The lines would serve the additional purpose of separating the nomadic peoples not only from the Russians but also from one another, in order to both restrict their freedom of movement and reduce the endemic enmity among them.

A line running from Kazan along the Kama to the confluence of the Belaia, then up the Ufa River to the Urals marked the boundary of the forest zone, south of which began the woodland region with its rich black soil. The Kama and its still swampy and forested left bank had long been a frontier between the Tatars in Kazan and the Bashkirs on the upland. In the 1650s, a so-called Transkama Line was built between Belyi Yar on the Volga, along the Little Cheremshan to Menzelinsk on the Menzela River, the western boundary of the Bashkir lands. In 1731, orders were given to move the southern portion of the line eastward into the steppe from Alexeevsk on the Samara and along the Sok River in order to link up with the old line at Kichuevsk, incorporating the entire valley of the Little and Great Cheremshan.[20] But the Transkama Line was barely finished when it became obsolete. In 1734, a so-called Orenburg Expedition (later called Commission) was appointed under the command of Ivan Kirilov with an instruction to build a fort at the confluence of the Or and Ural Rivers, to be called Orenburg. It later became Orsk, when Orenburg was moved to its present location at the confluence of the Sakmara and Ural in 1743.

The decision to build a fort where the Ural makes a sharp westward turn was a bold move to incorporate the whole of Bashkiria within a triangle formed by the Transkama Line, the Samara, and the Ural, which shifted the "international" border of the empire 600 kilometers to the east. Forts were built throughout the 1730s along both rivers — the timber brought down from the mountains of the new hinterland — from Karagaisk on the watershed between the Ural and Ui Rivers (which was also the watershed between the basins of the Caspian and Kara Seas) and along the entire course of the Samara, which flows in the Volga below Alexeevsk.[21] This new Orenburg Line opened up Bashkiria and the steppe south of

19. Solov´ev, *Istoriia Rossii*, 10:8.

20. Ivanin, "Opisanie zakamskikh linii," *Vestnik russkogo imperatorskogo obshchestva*, 1851, 57-78; A. Donnelly, *The Russian Conquest of Bashkiria 1552-1740* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 21.

21. Donnelly, *Russian Conquest…*, 59-75, 161-172.

the watershed between the valley of the Belaia and the Volga to colonization, and separated the Bashkirs from their enemies, the Kalmyks and the Kazakhs. It was built by what was essentially forced labor, even though the men were paid for their work. Peasants and natives were transferred from the more densely settled areas of Kazan province west of the Volga to build forts under the protection of dragoon units and were drafted into so-called land militia regiments, which became the nuclei of Russian settlements. Units of town Cossacks supplemented the two regiments of regulars brought in by Kirilov.

The building of Orenburg created a new military headquarters on the edge of the Kazakh steppe from which to project Russian influence, political and commercial, across the whole of Central Asia to the Hindu Kush.[22] But building a fence around Bashkiria brought about a massive rebellion between 1735 and 1741. It was put down with great cruelty by some 20,000 regulars, Cossacks, and peasants drafted for the purpose, who burned villages, carried out mass executions, destroyed cattle and horses, broke up families and deported children into the Russian interior.[23] Nevertheless, the line showed its usefulness in strengthening Russia's hold on a rich land beyond the inhospitable forest zone within which Russian settlements east of the Volga had been confined until then.

In order to complete a fortified perimeter facing the entire Aralo-Caspian depression, it was necessary to link the Ural and the Irtysh Rivers. In 1739 Lt.-Gen. Vasili Urusov, the new commander of the Orenburg Expedition, was ordered to begin construction of a line of forts along the 300-kilometer long Ui River, and down the Tobol to Kurgan. He was to build wooden forts surrounded by a wall and a moat every forty to fifty kilometers with redoubts in between, beacons and guns to warn of impending attacks.[24] The stretch between Kurgan and Omsk across the Ishim steppe was closed with the construction of the Ishim Line, built in the 1730s. It consisted of some sixty fortified settlements, began at Fort Lebiazh'e upriver from Kurgan, followed the Tobol to near the confluence of the Iset, swerved east to follow the upper Vagai River, headed toward Ishim, where it crossed the river of the name, and followed the present-day road past Lake Ik and via Tiukalinsk to Chernolutsk on the Irtysh, about fifty kilometers downriver from Omsk.[25] This Ishim Line ran along the edge of the forest zone and was intended to protect the older Russian settlements like Ishim, Tiumen, Tara and even Tobolsk against Kazak raids. The line, with its Cossack and peasant settlements, also created a logistical base from which to support the advance of settlers into still largely unknown steppe territory, which promised substantial rewards in terms of arable land.

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22. For Kirilov's instruction see *PSZ*, Vol. 9, n° 6571 (1734).

23. Donnelly, *Russian Conquest…*, 126-133.

24. *PSZ*, Vol. 10, n° 7876 (1739).

25. P (Anonymous), "Kratkaia khronologiia voennykh deistvii v Sibiri 1696-1769gg," *Voenny Sbornik*, n° 9 (Sept. 1910), 203-218, here 217; Slovtsov, *Istoricheskoe Obozrenie…*, 281-282; *Istoriia Sibiri*, 5 vol. (L.: Nauka, Leningr. Otd-nie, 1968-1969), here Vol. 2, 181-182.

This continuous perimeter stretched over about 4,000 kilometers from the Terek, along the lower Volga to Samara, along the Samara, Ural and Ui Rivers, cutting across the steppe to Omsk, and following the Irtysh to Ust-Kamenogorsk. It was the Russian counterpart of the Great Wall of China, not as a work of engineering of course, but as the embodiment of a certain vision of strategic security. The Russians and Chinese each drew a line separating the settled core from a nomadic frontier, but a frontier in which each core was claiming hegemony in its adjacent part, the Chinese in Mongolia, the Russians in the Kazakh steppe.[26]

The next twenty years from the early 1740s to the early 1760s were a decisive period in the history of Russia's eastern theater. The appointment of Ivan Nepliuev to succeed Urusov in 1742 and as the first governor of the new province of Orenburg in 1744 signaled an intensification of Russian colonization in Bashkiria with the creation of military settlements along the Orenburg Line, witnessed the creation of an Orenburg Cossack Host, and brought about increasing Russian intervention in the internal affairs of the Western Kazakh Horde. Nepliuev arrived after the crushing of a six-year long Bashkir rebellion (1735-41); his tenure would end in 1758 with another Bashkir rebellion (1754-56) caused, like the preceding one, by attempts to convert the natives, arbitrary seizures of land and forests, and a heavy tax burden.[27]

Manchu operations against the Zunghars had been suspended in 1722 following the death of the Kangxi emperor in Peking. The return of peace gave the Zunghars the opportunity to renew their raids into Kazakh territory, driving the Kazakhs to seek Russian support. This was most evident in the Western Horde, which was less exposed to Zunghar reprisals. Khan Abulkhair encouraged the Russians to build a fort on the Ural River, where he could find refuge in the event of a destabilization of the political situation in the horde as a result of the Zunghar raids. In 1731, the khan pledged allegiance to the Russian crown, and the Western Horde became a protectorate of the empire from then on; the khan would receive his investiture from the governor in Orenburg. His example was followed by the khan of the Central Horde that same year.[28] The Eastern Horde, which roamed in the Balkhash depression, remained firmly under Zunghar control. Such developments brought the Russians deeper into the politics of the steppe, as each khan sought to manipulate his relations with the Russians to gain his own ends against his rivals, and aroused the anger of the Zunghars, who accused the Russians of taking away Kazakhs they considered to be their subjects. The situation grew so tense that Zunghar forays into the steppe caused the Russians to fear in 1744 an imminent attack on the Irtysh Line and their possessions in the Altai, but it never took place.

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26. For a challenging interpretation of the history and myth see A. Waldron, *The Great Wall of China. From History to Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

27. *Istoriia Bashkortostana s drevneishikh vremen do 60-kh godov XIX v.* (Ufa: Kitap, 1997), 229, 231-247, 254-258.

28. Kasymbaev, *Gosudarstvennye deiateli…*, 16-23, 168-174; P. Rychkov, *Topografiia Orenburgskoi gubernii* (Ufa: Kitap, 1999), 73-87; M. Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford: Hoover Instit. Press, 1987), 31-34, 39-41; *PSZ*, Vol. 8, n° 5703-5704 (1731); vol. 9, n° 6567 (1734).

The senate ordered the dispatch of more combat troops to Siberia—three regiments of dragoons and two of infantry (about 4800 men) drawn from the former Southern Corps, with an option to send three more to Orenburg; to raise the number of irregulars by 6000 men; and to create four more regiments of garrison troops, to be levied locally. Moreover, it was decided to combine these forces, which would guard and patrol the Irtysh Line, into a Siberian Corps under the command of a major general.[29] The regulars arrived in 1745, but were never engaged in combat.

The death of the Zunghar leader in 1754 precipitated a succession crisis. One of the Zunghar chiefs, Amursana, defected to the Manchus and joined an invading force determined to impose upon Zungharia a protectorate similar to the one Peking had imposed on the Eastern Mongols. Amursana later betrayed the Manchus, who then decided to destroy the Zunghars. This genocidal campaign was completed by 1760; it brought Chinese troops within striking distance of Semipalatinsk, creating alarm in Petersburg and resulting in the partition of the Zunghar land with the Altai massif, the Manchus annexing southern Zungharia.[30] The Russo-Chinese frontier had ceased to exist, leaving only the Eastern Kazakh Horde in a kind of "international" limbo between the Chinese and the Tashkent rulers, until its final incorporation into the Russian empire in 1845.

By the time Catherine II came to power in June 1762, peace had returned to the Russo-Chinese frontier. The Chinese empire had reached its greatest territorial extent and was a satisfied power. The Russians would continue to face low intensity threats in their unstable share of the frontier in the Kazakh steppe, as well as in Transoxiana and Transcaucasia following the disintegration of Nadir Shah's empire. The Persian core itself would remain unstable until the end of the eighteenth century. Increasing commitments in the western and southern theaters required that more troops be deployed in the Russo-Polish and Russo-Ottoman frontiers, and that the eastern theater be given the lowest possible priority. This appears very clearly from the territorial distribution of the strategic force at the end of 1763.

Its size had risen to 62 regiments of infantry and 38 of cavalry for a total of about 150,000 men. In the south, there was only one regiment of dragoons in Tsaritsyn, and the Tsaritsyn Line was the southernmost perimeter of strategic deployment. The Caspian sector was practically denuded of troops. The same can be said of the Kazan-Orenburg sector. But there was uncertainty about the intentions of the Chinese both in eastern Mongolia and in the former Zunghar khanate: would they perhaps probe Russian positions on the upper Irtysh?[31] These concerns proved to be unfounded and the troops were later withdrawn. When we consider that the Chinese put 50,000 men in the field to defeat the Zunghars, the disproportion between

29. For a discussion of the issue and the Senate's decision see *Senatskii Arkhiv*, Vol. 6, 102-109, 174-185.

30. P. Perdue, *China Marches West. The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Presss, 2005), 256-289.

31. *PSZ*, Vol. 16, n° 11931 (1763).

Chinese and Russian capabilities in the Russo-Chinese frontier was striking. But the relative unconcern of the Russian resulted from their perception that the mountainous periphery which Gagarin and the Senate had once considered to be the southern perimeter of Russia's ambition — the Heartland's periphery — was also the northern periphery of China's ambitions.[32]

The Russo-Turkish war of 1768-74 had repercussions in the northern Caucasus. The stationing of a permanent garrison in Mozdok in 1770 challenged the Muslim highlanders, who already looked upon Kizliar as Russia's forward position from which to project power into their mountains. The Kizliar commandant was by then a major general, the highest rank for a man in such a position. The population was largely Armenian and Georgian, both Christian peoples, dreaming to expel the Ottomans from their homeland across the mountains. Daring raids were launched in 1770 against the vineyards and settlements around the fort, with their usual booty of women and children, either to be kept for ransom or to be sold on the slave markets of Dagestan. The punitive expeditions sent to recover the prisoners raised the level of anxiety and multiplied encounters between the men of the plain, who sought to block access to the sources of salt, and the highlanders, increasingly resentful of being restricted to the mountains. The creation of a separate post of commander of the Caucasian Line (along the Terek) in 1763, following the foundation of Mozdok, announced that the Russians had come to stay.

Further east, the Russians were shocked to discover that some 150,000 Kalmyks had suddenly left in January 1771 the sandy steppe between the Volga and the Ural Rivers, to which they too had been confined. In a desperate move to return to their homeland in Zungharia, recently devastated by the Chinese, they trekked across the Kazakh steppe in the depth of winter, and most of them were massacred by the Kazakhs, their age-long enemies. Their departure revealed the unreliability of the Ural Cossacks' support for the Russian government when their interests were not directly threatened — they were only too happy to watch the disappearance of turbulent neighbors—and the inability of the Orenburg authorities to collect sufficient troops rapidly enough to cope with a sudden emergency.[33]

At the end of the Russo-Turkish war, the army was distributed among eleven territorial divisions, of which the Eleventh incorporated New Russia and the Don territory, as well as Astrakhan and the Northern Caucasus. It was commanded by Grigorii Potemkin, who was also in charge of the War Ministry. Three regiments of infantry, 2 battalions of Jagers (sharpshooters), and one field battalion with two regiments of dragoons and the irregular troops were now stationed in the northern Caucasus. Kazan was the headquarters of the Eighth Division with three regiments of infantry in Kazan province and an "Orenburg Corps" of seven regiments (including two of dragoons with the Orenburg Cossacks). There was also a Siberian

32. The Manchus had already raised the issue of partition in 1731; *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, Vol. 1, 273-278; Perdue, *China Marches West…*, 272.

33. *Ocherki Kalmytskoi ASSR* (M., 1967), 199-202, 212-20; Courant, *L'Asie…*, 129-139.

Corps of 3 infantry battalions in Ekaterinburg, Semipalatinsk, and the Altai, and one of dragoons on the line.[34]

Developments in Transcaucasia, however, soon restored the traditional southward orientation of Astrakhan. Erekle II, the tsar of Kartlo-Kakhetia, was determined to strengthen his rule in eastern Georgia by breaking the opposition of his fractious nobility, and challenging Persia's hegemony in eastern Transcaucasia. In 1779, he took Yerevan and Ganzha and sought Russian support for his ambitious program to reunify Transcaucasia under Georgian leadership, as in the glorious days of Queen Tamar, on the eve of the Mongol invasion.[35] The policy was both anti-Turkish and anti-Persian, but Persia was the more dangerous neighbor. The Russians, who had been inactive on the Persian front since 1735, sent a naval expedition in 1781 to establish a commercial settlement at Asterabad on the Caspian coast, hoping to reorient the Persian-Indian trade northward toward Astrakhan and the Volga, a clear return to Petrine policies. The expedition failed, but it brought the Russians face to face with Aga Muhammad Khan, the local ruler, the founder of the Qajar dynasty (1795-1925).[36] Erekle obviously had a common interest with the Russians: it was sealed in the treaty of 1783, by which the Georgian tsar renounced any dependence on Persia and promised not to conduct diplomatic relations without Russia's approval.[37] The treaty was followed by the building of Fort Vladikavkaz on the Terek in the northern Caucasus, the point of entry to what would later be known as the Georgian Military Highway to the Georgian capital, and the dispatch of two battalions of infantry with artillery.

The Russian advance across the mountains aroused the enmity of the highlanders, who already resented Russia's increasing penetration of northern Dagestan. They found a charismatic leader in a Chechen shepherd, Sheikh Mansur, who claimed he had a vision in which the Prophet ordered him to call a holy war and to preach unity to all Muslims in the mountains, the closest thing to an attempt to square the circle. In 1786, he besieged Kizliar but could not take the fort, and 3000 combat troops forced him back into the mountains of the Kuban; he was eventually captured in 1791. The uprising marked the beginning of a guerilla war in the mountains, chiefly in Dagestan, where the Caucasus is the broadest, which would last until Shamil surrendered to the Russians in 1859.[38] The stationing of Russian troops in Tiflis threw down the gauntlet to Aga Muhammad Khan, who invaded eastern Georgia and devastated Tiflis in 1795, but failed to engage the Russians, who had withdrawn their troops. They were back in 1796, however, with

34. Russkii Gosudarstvennyi Voenno-Istoricheskii Arkhiv, f. Voenno-Uchenyi Arkhiv, d. 234, l. 2-4.

35. D. Lang, *The Last Years of Georgian Monarchy 1658-1832* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 173-180; Kortua, *Russko-Gruzinskie…*, 139-140, 146-152, 298-299.

36. Kortua, *Russko-Gruzinskie…*, 164-165.

37. *PSZ*, vol. 21, n° 15835 (1783).

38. A. Musaev, *Sheikh Mansur* (M.: Molodaia Gvardiia, 2007), 121-183.

20,000 men moving down along the coastal road to Baku, an obvious repeat of the war of 1722-23. Unlike the previous expedition, this one did not even have the time to fail for the same logistical reason, since the next emperor, Paul I, cancelled it.[39] But the Russian commitment to challenge both the Persians and the Turks was now firm. Eastern Georgia was annexed to the empire in September 1801. As a result, the center of gravity of the eastern theater, which had shifted to Bashkiria and the Kazakh steppe in the 1730s, shifted back to the Caucasus at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, at a time when Bashkiria had been pacified and the Kazakhs were entering the terminal stage of their political disintegration.

The change was reflected in the deployment of 1801.[40] Nineteen regiments were sent to the eastern theater in three "military regions" (called Inspections). Ten of them, including eight of infantry with 2 battalions of Jagers, were stationed along the Caucasian Line facing the mountains from the north, the others in Transcaucasia facing them from the south and in eastern Georgia. Four were stationed in Bashkiria, in Ufa and Orenburg and along the Kama on the Kazan border; the other five (with 2 Jager battalions) were in western Siberia along the Irtysh and Kolyvan Lines. Never before had there been so many combat troops in the eastern theater. The deployment reflected a policy which had gradually taken shape during the second half of the eighteenth century: to transfer more combat troops to the periphery in order to alleviate the burden placed on the Russian population in the core and, in the Caucasus, to cope with the growing threat from the mountains and the inevitability of war with Persia.[41]

III

War with Persia was inevitable because the consolidation of Russian power into eastern Transcaucasia—Georgia and Caucasian Azerbaijan — threatened Persia's vital interests. The recent founding of a new dynasty in Tehran was certain to arouse Persian pride to an even greater extent, and the accession of a young emperor in Petersburg, at a time when Russia had just landed troops in the Netherlands and sent an expedition to northern Italy, combined to create a determination on each side to expel the other from their common frontier in the Caucasus.[42] The Russo-Persian wars of 1804-13 and 1826-28 inaugurated a long period of warfare in the eastern theater which would not end until the final conquest of Central Asia with the annexation of Merv in 1884.

39. N. Dubrovin, "Podkhod grafa V. A. Zubova v Persiiu v 1796 godu," *Voennyi Sbornik* (Feb.-June 1874).

40. *PSZ*, Vol. 26, n° 19951 (1801).

41. LeDonne, *Grand Strategy…*, 177-184, 192-197.

42. For the geopolitical context of the Persian wars see LeDonne, *Grand Strategy…*, 155-176.

The immediate cause of the war of 1804-13 was the decision of the Yerevan khan to arrest the Armenian patriarch in Echmiadzin, elected in 1799 with Russian support, and to impose a pro-Persian one. He secured the support of the shah and the issue was joined. The commander of Russian troops in the Caucasus, Lt.-Gen. Pavel Tsitsianov, who had already occupied Gandzha (which he renamed Elizavetpol in January 1804) marched on Gumry in an enveloping movement directed against Yerevan. He reached Echmiadzin in June with 10,000 men and 20 guns, where he faced more than twice that number of Persian troops commanded by Abbas Mirza, the shah's son, who had only six guns and was defeated. The siege of the well-defended Yerevan failed, however, as the garrison held out and the Russians ran out of provisions. Tsitsianov had to withdraw, but secured the allegiance of the khans of Karabakh (capital Shusah/Agdam) and Sheki (capital Nukha), and the Shuragel salient (capital Gumri/Gyumri). The following year, the Russians annexed the Shirvan khanate (capital Shemakha/Samaxi), but their naval operations against Baku failed because their artillery was not powerful enough to batter the walls, and strong winds kept the ships unstable.[43]

The course of this first war was influenced by the larger conflict between Napoleonic France and its enemies, notably Britain and Russia. The Russians were defeated at Austerlitz in December 1805, Tsitsianov was treacherously murdered in January 1806 under the walls of Baku by the khan who had brought him the keys[44], but his successor later took the city as well as Derbend, and annexed the Kuba khanate between the two cities. All of eastern Transcaucasia was in Russia's possession by the end of the year: there remained only the two khanates of Yerevan and Nakhichevan to block the Russian advance to the middle Araks, which Petersburg had already determined must be the empire's boundary with Persia. The outbreak of the war between Russia and Turkey in January 1807, the defeat of the Russians in East Prussia, followed by the Treaty of Tilsit in June, and the dispatch of a French mission to Tehran to mediate Russo-Persian disputes brought about a lull in operations until 1809, when the Talysh khan in Lenkoran asked for Russian support against a Persian occupation. The coastal city was taken in September by Russian troops marching overland across the Mugan steppe.

Hostilities resumed in earnest in 1810, when the Persians, now in alliance with the Turks, launched a broad offensive against Tiflis from Nakhichevan but failed with severe losses, and found their rear nearly cut off by the Russian capture of Megri on the Araks. The withdrawal of some of the Russian forces in 1811, when war with France appeared imminent, and the growing military assistance supplied by Britain to Abbas Mirza, were not enough to give Persia a decisive advantage.

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43. L. Beskrovny, *Russkoe voennoe iskusstvo XIX veka* (M.: Nauka, 1974), 8-10; J. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus* (London: Longman, Green & Co, 1908), 67-69; V. Potto, *Kavkazskaia Voina*, 5 vol. (Stavropol: Istoricheskoe Nasledie, 1994), Vol. 1, 346-357.

44. Potto, *Kavkazskaia…*, Vol. 1, 325-326; A. Sokolov, "Astrakhanskii port," *Morskoi sbornik*, 1 (Jan-June 1851): 1-18, here 11-12.

The war reached a turning point in October 1812, when the Russians destroyed the Persian army at Aslanduz on the Araks, where Abbas Mirza lost all his artillery and was forced to retreat to Tabriz.[45] The Russians were now on the offensive, but Petersburg wanted peace in the southern and eastern theaters while it concentrated on countering the Napoleonic invasion. The treaty of Gulistan (between Yerevan and Nakhichevan), signed in October 1813, recognized the annexation of all the khanates except those of Yerevan and Nakhichevan and part of the Talysh khanate, and forbade Persia to keep warships on the Caspian.[46]

Abbas Mirza and the shah could not accept their defeat as final as long as they retained possession of the two Armenian khanates in the basin of Lake Sevan (Gochka) and the middle Araks, which gave them a base of operations against Tiflis and a passage to the Ottoman pashaliks of Bayazet (Dogubayazit), Kars, and Akhaltsykh. From Tabriz, Abbas Mirza's residence, military headquarters, and provincial capital, the strategic road continued to Nakhichevan and Yerevan and led on to the valley of the Kura and Tiflis. Likewise, the Russians could not feel their hold on Transcaucasia was safe until they had occupied the Armenian Upland overlooking the Kura valley to the north, in very much the same way as they needed to establish their hegemony in the mountains of the Great Caucasus before they could feel secure in the same Kura valley to the south. That is why the boundary disputes, including one over the coastal strip of Maidan on Lake Sevan, and the restlessness of the khans, who now felt threatened by the rise of Russian power, especially in the hands of a forceful administrator like General Alexei Ermolov (1816-27), were destined to fester and grow until the two major protagonists settled their conflicting claims once and for all.

Although Ermolov had long anticipated a Persian attack, he was taken aback by Abbas Mirza's invasion, launched in July 1826, at a time when Petersburg was still in turmoil following the death of Alexander I and the Decembrist uprising. Abbas may have had about 60,000 troops, Ermolov had only 45,000 on paper, but some 30,000 were scattered all over Russia's possessions in the region. Since the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, troops in the northern and southern Caucasus comprised the Separate Georgian Corps (renamed Caucasian in 1820), commanded by the Chief Administrator in Tiflis. It consisted of two infantry divisions, one in the north and the other in the south, with a force of dragoons, Cossacks, and native militias, and supported by 132 guns. Not only did the troops suffer from various illnesses because of the climate, to which the Russian soldier found it difficult to adapt, they also resented doing garrison duty on the Caucasian Line and the whole of Transcaucasia, between the Black Sea and the Caspian, which meant they had to keep fighting the highlanders. To concentrate enough manpower to fight even a disorganized force like the Persian army posed difficult logistical problems and

45. Beskrovny, *Russkoe…*, 17-19; M. Bogdanovich, *Istoriia tsarstvovaniia Imperatora Aleksandra I i Rossii v ego vremia*, 5 vol. (SPb., 1869-1871), here 5: 220-227, and Baddeley, *The Russian…*, 83-90.

46. *PSZ*, Vol. 32, n° 25466; N. Dubrovin, "Aleksei Petrovich Ermolov na Kavkaze," *Voennyi Sbornik*, n° 2 (1883), 205-240, here 205-207.

even threatened to disturb the entire strategic position of the Russian army in the region.[47]

Abbas advanced quickly, leaving 30,000 men to besiege Shusha, moving with another 20,000 to Elizavetpol on his way to Tiflis, while a second Persian force reached Gumri, but was not strong enough to advance further toward the Georgian capital. The Persian offensive stalled, but Ermolov claimed not to have enough troops to launch a counter-offensive. He remained in Tiflis, dazed by his humiliation, which was worsened by the arrival of the energetic General Ivan Paskievich who was sent by Nicholas I to take over the conduct of the war. Paskievich crushed the Persian right wing facing Elizavetpol at Shamkhor in September. The Persians lost heart, Abbas Mirza retreated to Tabriz, and Paskievich began to contemplate an attack on the city that would break the Persians' will to fight.[48]

The main objective of the 1827 campaign was the conquest of the two Armenian khanates, both in order to block any further Persian attempt on Tiflis and to round out Russia's possessions in Transcaucasia along the Araks River to its confluence with the Arpa on the Ottoman border. Following the dismissal of Ermolov in March, Paskievich was in full administrative and military control of the war effort[49], and much of the fighting was done by the Twentieth Infantry Division in very unfavorable conditions: the summer was exceedingly hot, the provision trains were slow in coming, and the troops suffered terribly. Paskievich had at his disposal about 25,000 men for offensive and siege operations, but the siege train did not arrive until August. The Russians entered Nakhichevan unopposed in June after investing Yerevan in May in order to prevent Abbas Mirza from relieving the city, and moved on to Abbas-Abad, a fort on the Araks which commanded the road to Tabriz. The garrison capitulated in July. However, Abbas Mirza with some 30,000 Persians managed to challenge the Russians at Echmiadzin, failed, but convinced Paskievich he had to give priority to taking Yerevan over the march on Tabriz. The city was stormed in October. At the same time a detachment of Russian troops from Abbas-Abad, after taking Marand on the way, appeared before Tabriz. The garrison troops, who had heard of the storming of Yerevan, fled without a fight, and Paskievich entered Abbas Mirza's capital a few days later. However, the shah was not ready to make peace until Paskievich's advance on Tehran showed him he had no choice.[50] By the Treaty of Turkmanchai of February 1828 Persia ceded the two

47. In 1816 the Georgian (Caucasian) Corps had a total paper strength of 56,164 men, in 1819, of 67,869 men; Bogdanovich, *Istoriia tsarstvovaniia…*, Vol. 6, 268-269, Annex, 40; Dubrovin, "Aleksei Petrovich Ermolov," 222-224.

48. Beskrovny, *Russkoe…*, 166-169; N. Dubrovin, "Poslednie dni prebyvaniia Ermolova na Kavkaze," *Voennyi Sbornik*, n° 2 (1888): 189-222, here 195-222, and n° 3: 5-37; Baddeley, *The Russian…*, 158-160, Potto, *Kavkazskaia…*, Vol. 3, 94-151, 229-290.

49. For the controversy over Ermolov's dismissal see "Ermolov, Dibich i Paskievich, 1826-27," *Russkaia Starina*, n° 1 (Jan.-June 1872): 706-726, n° 2 (July-Dec.): 39-69, 243-280.

50. Beskrovny, *Russkoe…*, 169-172; Baddeley, *The Russian…*, 164-175, Potto, *Kavkazskaia…*, Vol. 3, 456-468.

Armenian khanates and the remainder of the Talysh khanate, pledged to pay in indemnity of twenty million silver roubles, and gave the Russians extraterritorial rights. The war of 1826-28 was the last Russo-Persian conflict. From that time on, Persia entered the sphere of Russian influence and was increasingly perceived as a bridge to Afghanistan and British India.[51]

But the solution of the Russian-Persian conflict did not put an end to warfare in the Caucasus. The guerilla war that was inaugurated by Sheikh Mansur intensified with the annexation of eastern Georgia, which required the creation of a lifeline between units stationed on the Caucasian Line and those operating south of the mountains. But such a lifeline challenged the Kabardians, the Ossetians and the Ingush to plunder the merchant caravans and provision trains. The advance of the settler, who gradually occupied the arable land and the pastures of the highlanders as well as the salt lakes and the salt flats that could not be found in the mountains, damaged their economy and increased the poverty of peoples who had long depended on plunder and the slave trade to meet their needs. Anger and resentment spread and more natives were pushed into the narrow valleys of the Caucasus, surrounded by impenetrable forests dissected by countless gorges. Highlanders were known for their great courage, sense of honor, and hospitality, but they were also fierce warriors in those mountains and gorges "wherever they can kill without running the risk of being killed."[52] They also lacked discipline and were weakened by constant internal squabbles.

Ermolov and his chief of staff, Major General Alexei Veliaminov, looked upon what would soon be known as the "Caucasian War" as essentially a struggle for Fortress Dagestan and its Chechen glacis sloping down to the Terek River. This "siege strategy" consisted in building parallels advancing toward the forts until the besiegers were close enough to bombard and storm them. The first parallel was the Caucasian Line, the second, a line called the Sunzha Line extending from Vladikavkaz to the Caspian with three strong points: Grozny built in 1818, Vnezapny (Khasaviurt) in 1819, and Burny (Buinaksk) in 1821. The new line, however, required the expulsion of the Chechens living between the Sunzha and the Terek, a decision that generated extreme hatred against the Russians. To penetrate the lands of upper Chechnia, Ermolov ordered the cutting of 500-sazhen (107 meter) wide roads across the forest in order to launch murderous expeditions against native villages. By 1819 it seemed that the strategy was working, but the successes of that year blinded Ermolov to the forces gathering against him.[53] The

51. *PSZ*, Vol. 3, n° 1794 (1828); LeDonne, *Russian Empire…*, 117-119.

52. "Zapiski Iosifa Petrovicha Dubetskogo," *Russkaia Starina*, 2 (April-June1895) : 113-144, here 139; M. Dubrovin, "Aleksei Petrovich Ermolov," *Voennyi Sbornik*, n° 4 (June 1882) : 185-220, here 186-189, 198.

53. M. Gammer, "Russian Strategies in the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan, 1825-1859," in M. Bennigsen Broxup, ed., *The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian advance towards the Muslim world* (New York: St. Martin's Press), 45-61; Baddeley, *The Russian…*, 106-108, 121-134; N. Tavrov, "Vostochnyi bereg Chernogo moria i ego znachenie dlia razvitiia russkogo moreplavaniia," *Morskii sbornik*, n° 9 (1862): 3-62, here 25-26.

conflict was about to assume a new form known as Muridism, a movement calling for the equality of all Muslims, a struggle to the death against the infidel invaders, and the imposition of the shari'a in the Muslim communities.

The brutal policies of the Russians — the systematic destruction of villages by artillery fire, the burning of fields and orchards, and the deportation of women and children — not only helped the proponents of Muridism consolidate their rule, but also forced them to compromise their ideals. The movement found a leader in Shamil, a legendary figure in the great encounter between Orthodox intolerance and Muslim fundamentalism and between two types of political despotism. A senseless and bloody fighting continued until the 1850s, when the tide finally turned in favor of the Russians, and Shamil was forced to surrender to the viceroy of the Caucasus, Prince Alexander Bariatinski, in August 1859. The Caucasian war was nearly over.[54]

This long conflict explains why the center of gravity of the eastern theater had shifted to the Caucasus. At the end of the 1810s the Caucasian Corps still consisted of two divisions: the Twenty-First had a strength of 22,465 men, the Twenty-Second of 25, 161. There was also a grenadier brigade of 12,746 men and a regiment of dragoons (1602 men). With an additional 5,894 men in garrison battalions, companies of invalids and labor companies, the Corps had a total paper strength of 63,591 men. In fact, it was under strength by 16,011 men (47,580 men). These numbers did not include the Cossacks unit which in 1816 numbered 5,300 Cossacks of the line, 5,240 Don Cossacks, and 1634 Astrakhan Cossacks.[55] By January 1837, it was estimated that the corps consisted of 88,536 men on paper, but its actual strength was 61,874 men.[56] Three years earlier, the garrisons had been reorganized into line battalions, 16 of them in eastern Georgia and 11 on the Caucasian Line. Each battalion (or two or three together) were subordinate to the "governor" of one of the major administrative-territorial divisions or to commandants of fortresses like Piatigorsk, Vladikavkaz, and Kizliar.[57] Twenty

54. Baddeley, *The Russian…*, 251-265, 458-482; M. Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (London: F. Cass, 1994), 49-59, 69-80, 225-263, 277-291 ; Sh. Kaziev, *Imam Shamil´* (M.: Molodaia Gvardiia, 2001), 278-285. Baddeley and Gammer offer two different views of the conflict, the former emphasizing Russian successes, the latter, Russian rigidity and cruelty. Both have a point. Readers wishing to compare Russian "colonial" warfare with that of the French in Algeria and Morocco will read with profit J. Gottmann, "Bugeaud, Gallieni, Lyautey: The Development of French Colonial Warfare," in Edward Mead Earle, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy. Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1943), 234-259.

Among Recent Works, including reprints, examining the momentous conflict in the mountains see *Rossiia i Kavkaz skvoz´ dva stoletiia* (SPb.: Zhurnal Zvezda, 2001), a collection of articles edited by G. Lisitsyna and Ia. Gordin. See also Ia. Gordin, *Kavkaz: zemlia i krov´. Rossia v Kavkazskoi voine XIX veka* (SPb.: Zhurnal Zvezda, 2000), and R. Fadeev, *Kavkazskaia voina* (M.: Eksmo, 2003), a reprint of some of the general's works; for his views on Muridism see p. 260-270. For a collection of memoirs dealing with the early period, see *Kavkazskaia voina: istoki i nachalo, 1770-1820 gody* (SPb., 2002).

55. Bogdanovich, *Istoriia tsarstvovaniia…*, Vol. 6, 287-288; Baddeley, *The Russian…*, 126.

56. Baddeley, *The Russian…*, 294.

57. *PSZ*, Vol. 9, n° 6917 (1834).

years later, the status of the corps was raised to that of an army, and Bariatinskii had over 200,000 men at his disposal.[58]

By contrast, the Orenburg Corps, incongruously called the Twenty-Second Infantry Division, consisted of only ten line battalions (about 7,300 men)—with thirteen companies of invalids and two of convoying troops (*etapnye komandy*) attached to the tenth battalion—of the Orenburg and Ural Cossack Hosts, together with three hosts of native troops—one of Stavropol Kalmyks, another of Meshcheriaks (Mishari), a third of Bashkirs, a total of about 113,370 rank-and-file combatants. The Bashkir host alone numbered 73,069 men, followed by 12,500 Meshcheriaks, or 85,569 out of 113,370 officers and men.[59] In Siberia, the Separate Corps (Twenty-Third Infantry Division) consisted likewise of eleven line battalions in three brigades, with twelve companies of invalids, one penal labor company, and 38 companies of convoying troops, reflecting both the great distances and the importance of the exile system in the territory. A fourth brigade was stationed in eastern Siberia under the command of its governor general, and consisted of 14 line battalions, ten companies of invalids, and 28 of convoying troops, a total of about 20,000 men for the entire corps.[60] In other words, there were no combat troops outside the Caucasus, only garrisons in the major district (*uezd*) centers and units engaged in the management of an embryonic Gulag in Siberia. One can thus claim that by the 1830s, the Orenburg Territory and Siberia, as well as the northern Caucasus, save for the mountain zone south of the Line, fully belonged to what had been for three centuries an expanding Russian core. In this core area, the government was determined to create a one and indivisible Russia. The mountains and Transcaucasia on the other hand were an imperial outcrop, where the Russian presence would essentially remain civil and military without any substantial Russian (or Slavic) settlement.[61]

The expedition of 1839 against Khiva, the first since Cherkasskii's in 1717, but now launched from Orenburg instead of Astrakhan, inaugurated a new forward policy in the region. The military governor of Orenburg, Lt. Gen. Vasilii Perovskii (1833-42, 1851-57) had been concerned since his appointment with the deteriorating situation in the steppe and Central Asia. One of his first decisions in 1834 was to build a fort on the Caspian coast where the sea used to protrude deep inland (Mertvyi Kultuk) called Novo-Alexandrovsk, moved to Tiuk Karagan Bay in 1846. It was he who built in 1836 the New Line from Orsk to Berezovskii on the

58. Kaziev, *Imam Shamil´*, 272.

59. *Svod voennykh postanovlenii (SVP)*, 5 vol., SPb., 1838, here kniga 1, annex, p. 39. See especially *A Narrative of the Russian Military Expedition to Khiva under General Perofski in 1839* (Calcutta, 1867), 101. Line battalions were first created in Orenburg in 1804 as garrison troops. They were extended to the Caucasus and Siberia in 1829. Each battalion consisted of 728 men, including 600 privates. A company of invalids had 177 men, 150 of them privates; See *PSZ*, Vol. 4, n° 2824-2825 (1829).

60. *SVP*, 40-41.

61. J. LeDonne, "Building an Infrastructure of Empire in Russia's Eastern Theater 1650s-1840s," *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 47, 3 (sept. 2006): 581-608, here 607-608.

Ui River and contributed to increase the very turmoil his expedition was intended to end. But Perovskii was unable to convince Petersburg of the necessity of moving against Khiva until news arrived that the British were launching what came to be called the First Afghan War in 1839.[62] A British move against Kabul required a Russian counter-move toward Central Asia, and Khiva was the obvious target. Its purpose was to overthrow the existing khan and replace him with another one more receptive to Russian pressures.

The original operational plan for the conquest of Khiva called for a 1250-kilometer long march across an inhospitable steppe from the confluence of the Ilek and Ural rivers to the Ustiurt Upland, which Cherkasskii had followed on his way to Khiva in 1717. It was expected to take fifty days. The force would consist of three and a half battalions from the Twenty-Second Division, three Cossack regiments — about 5200 men — and twelve guns, as well as 10,000 camels to carry the provisions, forage, and ammunition, including one million cartridges. A large stock of biscuit was built at Novo-Alexandrovsk, and Perovskii sought to win the neutrality of the Kazakhs with expensive gifts. The expedition would begin in the spring of 1840. But in one of the most striking examples of the influence of individual personalities on the course of human events, Perovskii had fallen under the influence of a Polish exile, who had been banished to Orenburg after the 1831 rebellion: Major General S. Ciołkowski (Tsiolkovskii), who dissuaded Perovskii from appointing a chief-of-staff and quartermaster, and convinced him that he himself should assume the provisioning of the cavalry which he was appointed to command. Ciołkowski obviously had his own interests in mind. He also convinced the governor that a winter campaign was preferable, because there would be no shortage of water in the steppe. Perovskii changed his mind and decided to march in November 1839.

A disaster was in the making. It was already 30 degree (Centigrade) below zero on November 1 and the force did not reach the Emba River, 500 kilometers from Orenburg, until mid-December, when it should have been under Khiva. Men were falling sick in ever greater numbers from fevers and scurvy caused by temperature changes and bad water. Khivan horsemen began to harass the expedition. By January 1840, the Russians were caught in one snowstorm after another, men and camels died, with only 1900 men and 5200 camels remaining. Perovskii decided to retreat, but the survivors did not make it back to Orenburg until June. Perovskii left for Petersburg, where he was nevertheless promoted to full general in 1843.[63]

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62. Perovskii," in *Russkii biograficheskii slovar´*, 25 vol. (SPb., 1896-1918), here vol. 13(1902), 530-40; I. Zakharin (Yakunin), *Graf V.A. Perovskii i ego zimnii pokhod v Khivu*, (SPb.: Soikin, 1901), Part I; E.G. Vertusova, G.P. Matvievskaia, A.G. Prokofeva, eds, *Orenburgskii gubernator Vasilii Alekseevich Perovskii. Dokumenty. Pis´ma. Vospominaniia* (Orenburg: Orenburgskoe knizhnoe Izd-vo, 1999).

63. For the expedition see Zakharin, *Graf V.A. Perovskii…*, Part II. See also P. Iudin, "Graf V.A. Perovskii v Orenburgskom krae," *Russkaia Starina*, n° 2 (April-June 1896): 409-429, 521-551, here 415-416; *Orenburgskii gubernator…*, 191-223.
The fullest account is *A Narrative*. See also H. Sutherland Edwards, *Russian Projects Against India from the Czar Peter to General Skobeleff* (London, 1885), 74-148.

Everyone was at fault: Tsiolkovskii for his cupidity and incompetence, Perovskii for trusting him and underestimating the obstacles, Petersburg for not assigning enough troops and money for the same reason. An English observer estimated that the expedition cost 70,000 pounds, while London assigned fifteen million pounds to the Afghan war, which ended in 1842 in an even worse disaster.[64] The dry steppe still formed a nearly impassable barrier, and Khiva could not be attacked from Astrakhan or from Orenburg — neither was a proper base of operation. A new approach was needed if the new forward policy in the direction of Central Asia was to succeed.

When Perovskii returned in 1851, it was decided to strike at Kokand instead by taking of its major forts on the Syr Daria, Ak Mechet. A detachment of 2170 men and 12 guns took it in July 1853, and three forts were built on the lower course of the river, building blocks of the future Syr Daria Line projecting Russian power across 1000 kilometers of the Kazak steppe south of the Ishim Line.[65] It would provide logistical support for the conquest of Central Asia in the 1860s. In the meantime, the British had "opened up" southern China in 1839 and 1842, and an enterprising governor general of Eastern Siberia, Nikolai Murav´ev (1847-61) "opened" northern China by sailing down the Amur in 1854: the river led to the Tatar Strait and the Sea of Japan. A new era was about to begin in the military history of the eastern theater.

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Looking back upon the three-century – long period of Russian eastern expansion, one can see that the ruling elite on the western periphery of what had been the Mongol empire asserted a determination to reconstruct the Mongol space, albeit one in which Mongolia would become but a distant and irrelevant eastern periphery. One can distinguish periods of rapid advance punctuated by pauses to take stock of what had been accomplished and what remained to be done. But there was at all times an overarching vision inspired by geography (even if its details were not quite well known yet) that a people moving out of the forest into the plain must find the outer periphery of its ambitions along the continuous mountainous ranges forming, in the eastern theater, the same immense amphitheater stretching from Transcaucasia to the Sea of Okhotsk that had once enclosed the Mongol empire.[66]

While perceptions among the ruling elite of Russia's future were informed by an ambition to keep enlarging the original Muscovite core until it reached the limits of the agricultural zone where the Russian would settle and prosper, that elite also

64. H. Rawlinson, *England and Russia in the East* (London, 1875), 155-156.

65. Michell, *The Russians…*, 320-370; Rawlinson, 156-168; M. Veniukov, "Obshchii obzor postepennogo rasshireniia russkikh predelov v Azii i sposobov oborony ikh," *Voennyi Sbornik*, n° 1 (Jan. 1872): 195-228, here 220-222.

66. A somewhat different view of Russia's perceptions of the Eurasian land mass in M. Bassin, "Russia between Europe and Asia: the Ideological Construction of Geography," *Slavic Review*, 50 (Spring 1991): 1-17.

possessed a much broader vision — to reunite the old Mongol empire (without the Chinese core), and to launch from Persia and the Sea of Japan a third and more extensive pincer movement to give Russia access to the fabulous riches of India by land and sea. When Peter I kept insisting that Russia's interest in Persia and Central Asia was but a prelude to gaining access to India, and one of his naval officers stated that Kamchatka could become a base of operations towards India, we can be certain that such phantasmagorical visions were circulating among the Petrine elite.[67]

They were of course wildly unrealistic, and the eastern theater could never by any means serve as a springboard for such extensive projections of power. Distances, insufficient capabilities, and disregard of logistical constraints combined to stymie the will of the powerful tsar-emperor, who was blinded by his overwhelming successes in his war with Sweden. The failure of Buchholz's and Cherkasskii's expeditions and the inability to gain staying power in northern Persia forced the post-Petrine ruling elite to scale down its ambitions and resort to a radically different policy of building up strength behind an artificial wall of forts between the Volga and the Altai. This formed a defensive perimeter to protect Russian settlers against nomadic raids, but it also served an offensive purpose by preparing a logistical base from which to resume the advance in the direction of the mountains.

In fact, there could be no strong defense without an offensive capability directed chiefly against the Kazakhs, the largest nomadic group in Central Eurasia, and against the Bashkirs, who were not only nomads but also landowners. Both peoples had the most to lose from the inroads of the settler, and the Russians had to conduct various forms of asymmetrical warfare with peoples who could not win because of the weakness of their political organization and their inferior military technology. Punitive expeditions were accompanied by moving the line of forts deeper into the steppe of the good land, what with the construction of the Orenburg Line, the New Ishim Line, and, much later, the Syr Daria Line. East of the Altai, the impassable Sayan range and a few forts beyond Lake Baikal kept the peace along the Mongolian and Manchurian border. During this second period in the history of Russian expansion in the eastern theater, the center of gravity of Russian preoccupations was the Orenburg-Omsk sector, where a defensive posture was inseparable from offensive operations against native peoples stubbornly refusing to recognize an irreversible fact: the Russians, unlike the Kalmyks and the Zunghars, had come to stay and were determined to create with them a unified and indivisible Russia. That was the implication of the reforms of the 1780s, which aimed at the administrative, social, fiscal, and judicial unification of the core throughout the eastern theater.

One must consider the difficult question of whether the building of the lines was designed to protect the advancing settlements moving out in the eighteenth century of the forest zone in search of better land, or reflected a deliberate intent on the part of the military establishment and the ruling elite as a whole to stake out more territory for political and strategic purposes? Did these policies seek to fulfill the

67. LeDonne, "Building an Infrastructure…," 586.

vision spelled out by Governor Matvei Gagarin in Tobolsk in 1715 that it was Russia's ambition to reach the headwaters of all the great river of Siberia[68], in effect carving out a Russian realm which would reunify the space once occupied by the Kipchak khanate and into which the settler would then supplant the nomad? Advancing colonization and strategic considerations seem to have been so intertwined as to be inseparable. Certainly, the Russian population had become a majority everywhere save in Bashkiria by the end of the eighteenth century, but the settler seems to have remained behind the line, instead of taking dangerous chances exposing his family to nomadic raids in the open steppe. If that was the case, the construction of lines was a political act with intended social consequences. That was certainly the case in Bashkiria, where the founding of Orenburg in the middle of nowhere created a military headquarters both to help project Russian influence in Central Asia all the way to Afghanistan and protect peasant communities and industrial enterprises in the southern Urals. But the military presence remained small, and the Russians relied chiefly on local horsemen, who were better equipped to deal with the nomads than regular infantry. Whatever infantry was sent to Siberia to supplement these irregular forces was deployed in anticipation of a possible Zunghar danger and the threat of a Chinese thrust into the valley of the Irtysh, in connection with the upheaval caused by the destruction of the Zunghars in the 1750s. If we compare military activities there with those in the other two theaters, the eastern theater was truly a strategic backyard in Russia's overall Eurasian strategy.[69]

Toward the end of the eighteenth century the center of gravity of Russia's ambitions shifted decisively to the Caucasian sector. Cossack activities in the foothills of the mountains raised tensions with the highlanders, and the unstable situation in eastern Transcaucasia took the Russians across the mountains and eastward to the Caspian shores, the first permanent annexation of a part of what had been the southern ulus of the Mongol empire. The resulting wars with the Qajar dynasty weakened the country irremediably and transformed it into an uneasy protectorate of the Russian empire, while the 1839 expedition against Khiva evinced a new policy of active intervention in Central Asia reminiscent of that of Peter I. The Persian wars and the guerilla war in the mountains required large numbers of troops, larger than ever before in the eastern theater, but still smaller than the numbers put in the field in the southern and western theaters. Here too, however, one witnessed megalomaniac projects like that of Alexander Suvorov in 1795 to cross the Balkan and conquer Constantinople in two campaigns and that of the Zubov brothers at the same time to repeat Peter I's invasion of western Persia

68. J. LeDonne, "Proconsular Ambitions on the Chinese Border," *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 45,1-2 (2004): 31-60, here 35.

69. This may be contrasted with Bruce Menning's judicious remarks on the importance of the frontier as a drain on Russia's military power. The mountain war in the Caucasus was of course an exception, but it was not a form of regular warfare either: see B. Menning, "The Army and Frontier in Russia," in C. Reddel, ed., *Transformation in Russian and Soviet Military History* (Washington, D.C.: United States Air Force Academy, 1990), 25-38.

and strike at the Turks via Baghdad — the perfect example of another pincer movement directed against Anatolia.[70]

From that time on, Russia was on the offensive in southern and central Eurasia (Persia-Central Asia and the Kazakh steppe respectively), while probing in eastern Eurasia (eastern Siberia), waiting for an opportunity to break through to the Amur Valley. The eastern theater was becoming again a springboard for operations on a continental scale. The aim was no longer defensive fortification but the eventual incorporation of territories within the old Mongol realm and the Heartland's periphery, as well as the establishment of international borders. With the annexation of the Amur valley and the Maritime Province in 1858-60, the conquest of Central Asia in the 1860s-70s, and the partition of Persia in 1907-15, the Russians finally succeeded in reunifying the space once occupied by the Mongol empire and were well on their way to establishing a protectorate over Mongolia itself. With the exception of southern Eurasia, which contained the Persian core, the Russians had almost accomplished their goal (there remained only Tannu Tuva, or the headwaters of the Enisei River, which was annexed in 1945) with a minimum of expenditure of force, illustrating the adage of the Chinese strategic thinker: "to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill."[71]

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70. Plan, podannyi Grafom Suvorovym na utverzhdenie Eia Velichestvu Russkoi Imperatritse v 1795," *Russkii Arkhiv*, 2(5-8) (1914): 159-190, here 159-175; LeDonne, *Grand Strategy*…, 105.

71. Cited in J. Collins, *Grand Strategy. Principles and Practices* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1973), p. 15; see also B. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Meridian, 1991), 324.